

Chinese Hermeneutics as Politics: The Sung Debates Over the Mencius

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Outline

- A. WHY THE MENCIUS-CONTROVERSIES
- B. WHAT IN THE MENCIUS-CONTROVERSIES
- C. CHINESE HERMENEUTICS AS POLITICS

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This essay is a historical demonstration on the profoundly pragmatic character of Confucian scholarship, via a description of the Sung (960-1279) Confucians' hermeneutical debates over the *Mencius*. Scholarly debates in Confucianism *are* themselves political wranglings over legitimation of a political institution, policy decision, and its implementation. Such a phenomenon is rarely seen elsewhere in the world.

This essay has three sections. Section A specifies *why* the Mencius-controversies took place in the Sung era, the four causes that catapulted the *Mencius* into a storm center of debates during the Sung years. Section B details *what* the debates were about, the contents and processes of these Mencius-controversies between the pro-Mencius scholar-officials and the anti-Mencians. Section C concludes with some novel implications on Chinese hermeneutics as politics.

A. WHY THE MENCIUS-CONTROVERSIES

To begin with, we must ask three questions concerning the historical background and significance of the Sung debates over the *Mencius*. (i) Why did the Sung scholar-officials debate over the *Mencius*, and not any other writings? (ii) Why did the debates happen specifically during the Sung period? (iii) What significance did such a seemingly pure scholarly debate have for concrete political life? (1) The first two questions ask for causes for the Mencius debates; (2) the last one, when answered, constitutes their result.

A.1. The first two questions, why debates over the *Mencius* and why in the Sung period, can be answered together by four historical causes as follows: (a) canonization of the *Mencius* in the Sung period, (b)

the historical situations between Mencius' times and the Sung period, (c) the Mencian ideal of populism becoming the yearning target of Sung Confucians living under difficult times, and, most importantly, (d) Wang An-shih's adoption of the *Mencius* as basis for his New Reform movement.

A.1.a. It was during the period of Sung dynasty that the *Mencius* came to be canonized as one of the noteworthy Classics. We have four cumulative events which came together to canonize the *Mencius*.

Emperor Chen Tsung of Sung (眞宗, r. 997-1021) showed respect for the *Mencius* by ordering a commentary on it to be written, and Sun Shih (孫奭, 962-1033) wrote *Meng Tzu Yin-i* (孟子音義) in AD 1014. Then Emperor Jen Tsung (仁宗, r. 1022-1063) of Northern Sung had a stone tablet erected (AD 1061), on which was carved the *Mencius* with other eight standard Classics, which raised the status of the *Mencius* up to that of the classic.¹ Then on June 29 of 1084, Emperor Shen Tsung (神宗, r. 1067-1084) of Northern Sung celebrated Mencius in the Confucian temple.² From then on, Mencius drew attention among scholars who wrote on Mencius, both pros and cons.

Chu Hsi (朱熹, Hui-an 晦庵, 1130-1200) came to adopt the *Mencius* and compiled the "Four Books" with other three classics — the *Analects*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. Finally, in 1313, Emperor Jen Tsung (仁宗) of Yuan (r. 1311-19) adopted Chu Hsi's *Ssu Shu Chang Chü Chi Chu* (*Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*) as a standard text out of which questions are produced for the state examinations.³ From that time on, the *Mencius* became one of the "must reads" with other three classics. Formerly the celebrated phrase was

"Chou, K'ung"; now people say, "K'ung, Meng," indicating that Mencius was now next in status to Confucius.

This fact of canonization provoked two scholarly phenomena about the *Mencius*: First, the book was now paid special scholarly attention as one of the Classics. Yet, Secondly, "attention" means not just veneration; it also meant critiques, sometimes quite vehement. Peculiar to the *Mencius* or not, *critical* attention to the Classics was not unheard of in China; the Classics were merely "noteworthy," not always unconditionally revered. In any case, it was thus that the period of Sung was the period during which the *Mencius* came to be debated over among Confucian scholar-officials.⁴

A.1.b. The book of *Mencius* drew critical attention among the Sung scholars because the Mencius' situation which provoked his writing paralleled the situation of the Sung period those scholar-officials were in. These two situations were both characterized by people's intolerable suffering under political oppression.

Mencius' situation of popular miseries in latter part of the Warring Period (463-222 B.C.) were due to three factors: First, short-sighted feudal profiteering was so widespread that the *Mencius* had to open with a discussion of the distinction between *i*-rightness (sharing) and *li*-profit (hoarding).⁵ Secondly, there was rampant political mismanagement. Mencius described the situation thus: those rulers "robbed their people of their right seasons, rendering them unable to till the lands to care for their parents, who starve in freezing cold, and brothers and families were scattered." (1A5) Finally, rulers of his days were all addicted to continual warfare for cities and lands, for which people lied dead and rot in the

fields (1A6).

Although Mencius' situation of popular miseries was not completely paralleled the Sung situation, the following political situation in Northern Sung was noteworthy: First, centralization of political power in imperial court,⁶ accompanied by the weakening of powers of prime ministers,⁷ strengthening of security and espionage network,⁸ and promotion of literary debates as means of consultation concerning policies, which contributed to the weakening of the military and invited invasions of Nomadic people living in marginal territories.

Mencius' situation of popular miseries provoked Mencius' passional ideal of populism, the people-centered government. It was natural, then, that centralization of power during Sung dynasty strongly reminded the scholar-officials of Mencian ideals, over which they could not help but debate.

A.1.c. The last paragraph above deserves expanding as a separate factor responsible for the Mencius-debate. The topics discussed among concerned scholar-officials were typically the mode of government (royalism and its legitimation), legitimation of policies that made people miserable, etc. For those scholar-officials were caught in two incompatible worlds: they were subjects at the imperial court of political reality, while they yearned after the ideal world of popular happiness. These were at the core of Mencius' writing, and so Mencius' ideas — *wang-pa* distinction, ruler-ruled relation, etc. — naturally came into debates as part of possible forms of government.

A.1.d. Specifically, Wang An-shih (王安石, 1021-1086), an avid reader and lover of Mencius, used Mencius' ideas and ideals as the basis

for his Reform movement, and used his high position in the court to promote Mencius on every possible occasion.⁹ Such a "one-sided favoritism" over Mencius naturally provoked an anti-Mencius sentiment among Wang's opponents. Debates over the Mencius ensued.

A.2. Now what was the *result* of all this? What significance did such a seemingly innocent, scholarly debate over the *Mencius* have for the nitty-gritty of political situation? The answer was the concrete political impact such controversies had, during the period, on policy decision and implementation, such as on Wang's Reform movement. Furthermore, the impact went beyond such a piecemeal ad hoc manner. It went to the very root of political institution and manner of governance as such — royalism or populism, true king or hegemony, the ruler-ruled relation being relative or absolute. Those conscientious scholar-officials, even among the royalists, may have hoped to admonish the monarchs, on imperial treatment of the populace, more or less tacitly via these innocent-looking scholarly debates over the Classics.¹⁰

One must confess that this was something unheard of in the West. We are yet to hear of canonization of Thomistic ideas provoking more critical controversies over Thomism than its veneration, much less such scholarly debates having direct political impact on political institution, policy making and implementation. But this was what happened during the period of Sung dynasty. We are now to see what constituted the Mencius-controversy in the Sung period.

B. WHAT IN THE MENCIUS-CONTROVERSIES

What irked the anti-Mencians and provoked their controversies was Mencius' departure from royalism which was the ruler-centered governance, for populism which was the people-centered governance.

Specifically, their controversies were concentrated on three notional areas which support and are implied in Mencius' anti-royalism: (1) *wang-pa* distinction, (2) ruler-ruled relation, and (3) what the "*Tao*" means. In these three areas of controversies they critically examined the legitimacy of Mencius' anti-royalism. The debates went as far as to attacking the very orthodoxy of Mencius.

B.1. The crucial bone of contention in Mencius' aversion to royalism was his distinction between two kinds of rulers — *wang* 王 and *pa* 霸. (a) Mencius and the pro-Mencians took the distinction to be that of humane *wang* versus inhumane *pa*. (b) The anti-Mencians took it as a mere distinction between rulers over large territories (*wang*) and those over small ones (*pa*).

B.1.a. The pro-Mencians took the distinction as a moral one, and morality — Mencius vividly described it as the heartfelt intolerance at people's suffering (*pu jen jen chih hsin*, 不忍人之心)--is as absolute a prerequisite of rulership as it is both naturally ingrained in us and inherent in the texture of the heaven and earth themselves (2A2, 6, 6A8).¹¹

Negatively putting the above political-metaphysical view throws the *wang-pa* distinction into a typically anti-royalist relief. Unless the ruler lets his suffering-intolerant heart-mind (*pu jen jen chih hsin*, 不忍人之心) lead him toward suffering-intolerant government (*pu jen jen chih cheng*)

(1A7, 2A6), the world would be in horrendous misery and confusion, wherein the "ruler" is no legitimate ruler (*wang*) but a mere despotic rascal fit to be removed (1B8). The *pa*-ruler controls people with brutal force under the pretext of humaneness; the *wang*-ruler moves by humaneness (*jen*).

Sadly, in contrast to the legendary Three Dynasties wherein people lived together happily under one *wang*-ruler after another, the world of Mencius' days was ruled entirely by *pa*-rulers; the world was all "flooded" with "fire" of miseries (2A1, 3B5, 6A18). Since *pa*-brutality came from royalism which was the ruler-centered government, Mencius was deadly opposed to royalism. Since royalist brutality was particularly felt among the people, and since suffering-intolerance concerned the people, advocating the government of suffering-intolerance amounted to promoting populism which was the people-centered government.

Thus this Mencian and pro-Mencian view effectively undermined royalism for populism; the very name and essence of "government" consists in managing affairs to promote popular welfare, and *nothing else!* And this view was what stuck in the craw of Sung imperialism and the royalist scholar-officials. They had to do something about it.

B.1.b. And ingenious indeed was what the anti-Mencians did. They had three points: (a) to take the *wang-pa* distinction as that between rulers with humaneness and justice (*jen i*) and those without, is otiose and *irrelevant* to governance, since humaneness is a *sine qua non* for effective government anyway, for without it no politics obtains.¹² The *wang-pa* distinction is merely that in rank and extent of rulership. Besides, (b) the effectiveness of the *pa*-ruler's governance over small

territories derives from his allegiance to the *wang*-ruler over vast ones.¹³ Finally, (c) since political effectiveness originates in humaneness and justice (*jen i*), both the legendary Three Dynasties and late ones such as Ch'in, Han, Sui, and T'ang, have all been effective, there are no qualitative differences between the Three Dynasties, on the one hand, and the later ones, on the other.¹⁴

B.2. A natural and important corollary to the above debate on the *wang-pa* distinction in rulership, was controversies over the ruler-ruled relation, as to whether it was (a) merely relative and contractual, or (b) absolutely binding, inherent in the very texture of the heaven and earth themselves.

B.2.a. For the pro-Mencians the ruler-ruled relation was a correlative contractual one. This was a natural outcome from Mencius' anti-royalist populism: if the sole business of rulership was to care for the people, then the rulership lasts only so long as this rulership-obligation was fulfilled. "Let the ruler take his subjects as his hands and feet, then the subjects shall take him as their hearts and souls;... let the ruler take his subjects as grass and dirt, then his subjects shall take him as their rival and enemy." (4B3) Ming T'ai Tzu (r.1368-98) was reported to have been fiercely raged over this passage.¹⁵

Such Mencius' contractual ruler-ruled relation came from two sources: populism (*min pen*) and meritocracy (*shang hsien*). Populism relativizes rulership into a contractual one; rulership is legitimated on this populist ground. Furthermore, the ruler needed popular inputs for his effective government, and meritocracy arose; those more sensitive and sagacious among common people jostled into the courts of the feudal lords to have

their views heard; hence, meritocracy.¹⁶ When they were heard in a strong state, they stayed; if not heard, or else the ruler was not strong enough to support them, they left for another ruler. Hence, contractual relativism within the ruler-ruled relation (cf. Mencius, 3B2, 4).

B.2.b. Naturally the anti-Mencians could not put up with such a view subversive of imperialism. They attacked Mencius for inciting an extremely undesirable aftermath, disrespect and disloyalty to the rulers.

Ssu-ma Kuang (Chhn-shih, 1019-1086) cited the historical example of Chou Kung assisting King Ch'eng when the king was quite young; his behavior of respect of rank disregarded the values of virtue and age. Mencius wanted people to value virtue and age as much as rank (2B2); but without Chou Kung's exemplary behavior, Ssu-ma Kuang was afraid that people might well become insubordinate because of their pride on virtue and/or age.¹⁷

Similarly, Li Kou (李觀, T'ai-po 泰伯, 1009-1059) castigated Mencius for being so unfair to Chou monarchs; they were merely a bit weak, not at all as bad as Chieh 桀, and did not deserve disloyalty which Mencius advocated.¹⁸ Cheng Shu-yu (鄭叔友) said that Mencius wanted those feudal lords to act as if they were legendary rulers such as King T'ang and King Wu, but Mencius never obtained the ruler's instruction to do so.¹⁹

The anti-Mencians further noted that what made the rectification of the names (*cheng ming*, 正名) of rank-distinction work was the ruler's own "rectification of the hear-tmind" (*cheng hsin*, 正心) in the sense of his moral self-cultivation. This was at the base of rulership. And so the ruler's self-cultivation (*hsiu yang*, 修養), the rectification of the (abso-

lute) name (*cheng ming*) of ruler-ruled relation, and royal managing of the world (*ching lun*, 經綸), these three went together in a mutually supportive relation.²⁰

Fundamentally, Ssu-ma Kuang insisted that *Li* (禮, rite) and *Ming* (名, name, distinction)--the ruler-ruled relation — is absolutely needed (for the law and order of our communal living), an essential part inherent in the very order and texture of the universe.²¹ Confucius fully promoted this aspect of political management; he refused to be served by the feudal lord of Wei as if he, Confucius, were a monarch, on the ground that would have violated the *Li* of name (distinction). For Confucius was a mere commoner.²² Then Ssu-ma Kuang cited several historical exemplary subjects who were loyal to their deaths to their monarchs.²³ He castigated assassins of rulers as never deserving of the name, "righteous" (*I*, 義).²⁴

B.3. The last point in the above sub-section brings us to two fundamental problems: (a) whether Mencius was within the line of Confucian orthodoxy at all, which in turn raised the question of (b) what the basic order of things amounts to, that is, what the *Tao* (道) of the universe means, especially in a political context. This sub-section treats these basic issues as debated by the Sung Confucians.

B.3.a. In their desperation, the anti-Mencians went all the way back to the root of things about Mencius, and noted three obvious points about him in relation to Confucius: first, Confucius was not as severe in criticizing the rulers as Mencius did, much less to the extent of advocating populism *against* royalism; second, Mencius clearly stated that he was a disciple of Confucius; and three, Confucius was the undisputed origin of

Confucian orthodoxy. Given these finally points, the question naturally arose as to how orthodox Mencius was in the official line of Confucianism. Anti-Mencians labored on documentation to prove that Mencius was not an orthodox Confucian.

Since Mencius' discipleship under Confucius and Mencius' anti-royalism hardly require documentation, the anti-Mencians just culled historical materials on incidents of Confucius paying loyal respect to rulers.

One cited by Ssu-ma Kuang was mentioned in the above sub-section 2.b, on how Confucius begged off being treated like a ruler by the feudal lord of Wei.²⁵

Cheng Hou-shu (鄭厚叔 , Shu-yu 叔友 , ca. 1135) said, "Confucius said that if there were anyone who possesses him [i.e., his loyalty], that 'person' would be the Eastern Chou; this was Confucius' true heart-mind. In contrast, Mencius lived in the land of Chou, lived on the grains of Chou, and yet was without the heart-mind of Chou. This showed how much deviated from Confucius Mencius was, despite having studied under Confucius."²⁶

In short, as Li T'ai-po succinctly summed up the contrast, "The *Tao* of Confucius is 'The ruler be ruler-ly, the ruled be as the ruled should be.' The *Tao* of Mencius is, 'Everyone can become the ruler.'²⁷

The pro-Mencians were of course not silent. Typically Yü Yün-wen (余允文 , circa 1163) said, "Confucius had been received by 72 feudal lords, without urging them to pay special respect to the Chou royalty. . . . Even if Confucius urged those feudal lords to be loyal to the Chou royalty, their growth in strength would have eventually toppled down the

Chou. Confucius must have known all this which was not discerned by those vulgar Confucians of today."²⁸

Similarly, Chu Hsi (Hui-an, 1130-1200) said, "Confucius edited the annals of *Ch'un Ch'iu* to help revive the declining Chou dynasty; Mencius went about persuading feudal lords to revive the [true] kingly way (*wang tao*). Their different behaviors in differing times nonetheless shared the same objective."²⁹ For Confucius respected the Chou also for the sake of the benefits of common folks.³⁰

Chang Chiu-ch'eng (張九成, Tzu-shao 子韶, 1092-1159) chimed in, saying, "The ruler regards his people as his body; the people regard their ruler as their heart."³¹ And so, he continued, "To fulfill the *Tao* of ruler-ruled relation is to adhere to the love of people. Those who do not serve the ruler with the motive whereby Shun served Yao do not pay true respect to their rulers. Those who do not govern people with the motive whereby Yao governed people amount to robbing (*tse*) the people. What was Shun's motive of serving Yao? Taking people as the top-priority [in his political agenda]. What was Yao's motive of governing people? Also, taking people as the top-priority [in his political agenda]."³²

Furthermore, Mencius was far from being dispensable, as was often claimed by the anti-Mencians. Without Mencius the *Tao* of Confucius would have been lost in the violent hands of foul theories, said Yü Yün-wen.³³ Chu Hsi noted that Mencius was the crucial "boatman in the boat of Six Classics," presumably to maneuver it through the tides of the times.³⁴

B.3.b. But what was the *Tao* of Confucius? Did it differ from the *Tao* claimed by Mencius? To raise this sort of *Tao*-questions is to go to

the very metaphysical root of the Sung debates.

In sub-sections 1 and 2 above, the phrase, "inherent in the very texture of the heaven and earth themselves" was used to describe the absoluteness of both (i) humaneness (in B.1.a.) and (ii) rulership (in B.2.b.). The first one (i) was a common assumptive frame on which both pro-Mencians and anti-Mencians proceeded their controversies.³⁵ The second one (ii) concerns the anti-Mencians' understandable interpretation of the meaning of the "*Tao*," the ingrained principle of all things. And these two points actually constituted the third of the foci of contentions between these two Sung rivals.

Li T'ai-po's resounding announcement, "The *Tao* of Confucius is 'The ruler be ruler-ly, the ruled be as the ruled should be.' The *Tao* of Mencius is, 'Everyone can become the ruler.'" has been mentioned above in B.3.a. Li actually bypassed the *content* of Mencius' *Tao* as that of benevolence and justice (*jen i*, 仁義), which entailed the disturbing conclusion that everyone thus qualified for rulership can be admitted thereto. It was this disturbing conclusion that Li was attacking by citing the *Tao* of Confucius being that of the ruler-ruled relation, eternally distinct and inviolable.

The pro-Mencians were not slow in detecting the anti-Mencian intention. Yü Yün-wen responded by saying that the great essential (*ta yao*, 大道) of the *Tao* consists in benevolence and justice (*jen i*)," presumably meaning thereby that the basis of the ruler-ruled relation resides in the *Jen I*, which is, said Chang Chiu-ch'eng,³⁶ so fundamental as never to be negotiable by any vicissitudes of history. The *Tao* of Mencius was also claimed to be the *Jen I* by Chu Hsi.³⁷

The upshot of all this is as follows. Those who claimed the *Tao* to be that of the ruler-ruled relation stressed the inviolability (as stringent as the order of the universe) of the *position* of the ruler, because it is part of the nature of things, the inherent order of things. Hence, the ruler is beyond any disloyal critiques. Those who claimed the *Tao* as *Jen I* stressed the importance of qualification and critical examination of the *de facto* ruler, as well as a potential invitation to any qualified person to become the ruler, because the qualification is a moral one, and morality is an inherent part of the texture of the universe which includes any and all human persons.³⁶

At this point, we see how muddled the anti-Mencians' argument now became. We see two of their muddled points.

First, the anti-Mencians missed the point when they insisted on the absoluteness of the ruler-ruled relation, as if Mencius were bent on toppling over the very institution of royal rulership itself. But Mencius never dreamed of instituting a democratic government; he never insisted on having people as the ruler. He wanted not people-rulership but people-centered *rulership*.

In other words, Mencius' intention was not about the institution of rulership as such, but on the true meaning of the ruler and the qualification of the *person* claiming to rulership; the true meaning of rulership is populism (not democracy), and so the government of the *de facto* ruler should conform to this meaning, to qualify being a true ruler. Mencius and pro-Mencians were thus separating the individual ruler from the position of rulership, whereas anti-Mencians were insisting on such augustness of the ruler himself *qua* ruler as to be beyond *any* criticism.

And yet, secondly, even anti-Mencians themselves had to admit to the necessity of humaneness (*jen*) both in political management (for its effectiveness, as was mentioned in previous B.1.b.) and in the ruler himself *qua* ruler (as was mentioned in B.2.b.). But, then, this their own point destroys their insistence that the ruler can never be examined or criticized. Both these points--being blind to the difference between ruler and rulership, insisting on the necessity of humaneness in the ruler--exposed muddled incoherence within the anti-Mencians' position.

Actually, however, the Sung debates did not proceed in this manner.

C. CHINESE HERMENEUTICS AS POLITICS

It is time for us to (1) summarize what has been said about the Sung Confucians' debates over *Mencius*. Then (2) we will observe in them a Chinese distinctness, hermeneutics as politics.

C.1. We first survey what the above pages described, the Sung Confucians' debates over the *Mencius*, as to (a) how they came about, and (b) what all these debates were about.

C.1.a. To begin with, how did they come about? Section A above says that they came about by way of canonization of the *Mencius* during the Sung period. Canonization drew critical attention among scholar-officials, both pro- and anti-Mencian, to the new Classic of *Mencius*. Furthermore, it was the situation in Mencius' days of popular miseries which provoked his ideals. This Mencian situation of popular miseries paralleled the Sung situation of popular miseries; such a parallelism provoked the Sung scholar-officials to deeply meditate on the *Mencius*, and debate

about it. Their scholarly debates came to bear directly on their political decisions over policies and even political institution itself.

C.1.b. Then, what were all these debates about? Section B above says that the bone of contention was Mencius' shift of total allegiance away from the centralized government of Chou monarchs, relying instead on numerous local feudal lords to severally practice the benevolent Way of kingly politics (*wang tao*, 王道) for popular welfare. This was a shift to populism, subversive of the avid royalism of Sung times. It also so happened that Wang An-shih's New Reform movement was based on Mencius; Mencius thereby became the target of attacks by the anti-Wang scholar-officials.

Mencius' denial of the absolute supremacy of Chou monarchy provoked hot controversies over Mencius' three basic notional areas supporting his denial: *wang-pa* distinction, ruler-ruled relation, and the meaning of the "Tao."

First, the *wang-pa* distinction was taken by pro-Wang idealists to be that between the benevolent king (*wang*) of populism, the people-centered government allegedly practiced during the golden days of Ideal Three Dynasties, on the one hand, and the selfish brutal despot (*pa*) of royalism, the ruler-centered government of later period, on the other. The anti-Mencius realists, such as Ssu-ma Kuang, however, took the *wang-pa* distinction to be merely that between rulers over large territories and those over small ones, without any qualitative differences between these two groups (not "kinds") of rulers.

Secondly, the ruler-ruled relation for Mencius and Wang An-shih was a relative, contractual one. That is, the *de facto* "ruler" must fulfill his

obligation of promoting people's welfare; the ruler who neglects this duty, e.g., in profiteering and continual battles, *eo ipso* disqualifies himself from rulership and fits to be removed, forcibly if necessary. The anti-Mencius royalists of Sung, however, insisted on the eternal validity of the ruler-ruled distinction, the distinction of these "names" being quite appropriate and absolutely abiding, being essential to the ingrained order (*Tao*) of things.

Thirdly, the notion of *Tao* for the pro-Mencius officials meant the principle of benevolence (*jen*) and justice (*i*), which can and should be embodied by every reflective and virtuous person; since the ruler is one who embodies this *Tao*, this doctrine of the *Tao* implies that *anyone* who embodies the *Tao* is fit to rule, a potentially subversive doctrine of Sung imperialism.

The anti-Mencius Confucians, however, insisted that the *Tao* in Confucius meant the unchangeable order of things, among which they cited the ruler-ruled class relation. This view naturally consolidated the royalist position; the ruler-centered government is part of the very nature of things. Furthermore, since Confucius was the foundation of Confucian orthodoxy, and since Mencius seems to deviate from Confucius' alleged interpretation of the *Tao* as the essential class-relations of things, Mencius was rejected as outside of the official line of Confucian orthodoxy.

C.2. From the above rather straightforward historical description of what had transpired in what might be called the Sung "politics of Mencius debates," we see Chinese peculiarities of hermeneutics as politics; first, (a) the pragmatic character of Confucian scholarship; then, (b) the

common presuppositions of Mencius debates and their implications; and finally, (c) how the same text of Mencius can be and has been interpreted from radically different perspectives.

C.2.a. The pragmatic character of Mencius-debates takes two forms: (i) the pragmatic origin and character of the Mencian *ideals*, and (ii) the political character of *debates* over Mencius.

C.2.a.i. Mencius' ideals of populist humane government were provoked by the intolerable miseries among people. The debates over Mencius were provoked by the similarities between Mencius' situation and the Sung's. Thus the pragmatic origins of Mencius' ideals provoked debates over Mencius' ideals, which naturally were intensely pragmatic in implications (A.1.).

C.2.a.ii. The heat of seemingly innocent debates over the *Mencius* has shown to be pervaded with political scent. The heat was more political than scholarly; or rather, the scholarly heat was itself a political one. Debates over Mencius went to legitimize policies, to provide grounds justifying a new policy proposal, and even as far as to legitimize a specific political institution as such (A.2.).

This is amazing; we are pressed hard to find parallel cases in the West. No debates in the West over policies have yet turned crucially on scholarly discussion in classical scholarship. We are yet to hear of the debates, in the imperial court of papal or civic royalties, over how related Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is to his *Politics*, or how "orthodox" Augustine or Aquinas was in the Aristotelian tradition, and the like, all loaded with practical policy implications.

One must append here a sad note, however. The debates over the *Mencius* in Sung times seemed to have been a crucial fight between Confucianization of politics, on the one hand, and politicization of Confucianism, on the other. Confucianization of politics is humanization, "populism-ization," of political management; politicization of Confucianism is legitimation of despotic manipulation by sophistic reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics. Sadly, the latter had won the day during Sung, as it always has been, both before then and ever since.

In any case, in ways such as this essay delineated, the first characteristic of Chinese scholarship is exhibited: that it is intensely pragmatic, full of political overtones. To discuss the *Mencius* is to debate over political management.

C.2.b. Equally significant is to notice what were *not* debated over, disagreed upon. Three things at least were conspicuously absent in their controversies--the homo-cosmic continuum, the ideal rule of the virtuous, and the human nature as genetically, potentially virtuous.

The fact that they were not debated means that they serve as a common background, a shared assumptive frame of reference, for further debates over other policy matters. This means that no Chinese politics, and by extrapolation, no political maneuvers whatever, can afford being without them. They have to be at least advertised ostensibly as grounds for any policy implementation, including despotic autocratic ones such as those during the Sung era.

In fact, the Sung royalists were avid promoters of government by virtue and equation of social order (the ruler-ruled distinction) with virtue and integrity. Ssu-ma Kuang insisted that there could not have been a

distinction between the benevolent ruler and the despotic one, because without humane virtue (*jen*) no government is possible.³⁹

He further noted that the ruler-ruled distinction was absolutely binding, on the ground that disloyal subjects and assassins of royalty could not be called "righteous (*i*)," and such disloyal subjects had "no room (in the world) to accommodate themselves"; rebels such as Kuo Chieh (郭解) of Kuan Tung (關東) district deserved to be destroyed by the imperial power responsible for law and order in the community.⁴⁰ In sum, only virtue effectively rules the world, and the ruler cultivates himself for the correct "name" of rulership.⁴¹

All this demonstrates that (ingrained) goodness or virtue is needed, if not as an absolute ground then as a practical necessity, for communal living. This point may say something about the constitution of the world.
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C.2.c. It is interesting to note how Mencius hermeneutics during Sun proceeded from two radically different political-as-hermeneutical perspectives. One was populism represented by Wang An-shih; the other was royalism advocated by Ssu-ma Kuang. The Mencius seems to flex itself to accommodate these two mutually opposed interpretive maneuvers.

It is instructive, furthermore, to observe how the royalists maneuvered through the populist text of the *Mencius*. They adopted two tactics: (i) what can be reinterpreted in the text were hermeneutically tailored to their account; (ii) what cannot be so tailored were simply rejected as part of Mencian heterodoxy.

C.2.c.i. What can be reinterpreted were two: the *wang-pa* distinction;

and the meaning of the *Tao*.

The first *wang-pa* distinction was usually taken as the distinction between the kingly (*wang*) and the despotic (*pa*). The royalists reinterpreted it as a distinction between the ruler over greater territories (*wang*) versus the ruler over smaller areas (*pa*). This interpretation turned the quality-distinction of rulership into a quantitative one.

The second "interpretation of the *Tao*" was interesting. For Confucius, the royalists claimed, the *Tao* means the irrefragible Way of the irrefragable normative distinction between the ruler and the ruled, whereas the populists claimed the *Tao* to be the natural principle of the humane (*jen*) and the just (*i*).

Their implications are respectively obvious. The absolute ruler-ruled distinction established the ruler's position once and for all. The moral principle of human nature *qua* human entailed that any person qualified to be called truly human can and should rule for the promotion of human communal happiness.

C.2.c.ii. As to what were too clearly opposed to royalism to be reinterpreted away in any way, the royalists had no choice but to expurgate from the *Mencius*, on the condescending ground that Mencius himself was not orthodox enough to claim their allegiance. These insurgent ideas of Mencius were expressed in strong language, such as calling the ruler a "robber" (*tse*) who is "incapable" (*pu neng*, 不能), or a "mere fellow (or rascal)" (*i fu*, 一夫) fit to be killed who does not care for popular welfare. These seditious passages were expurgated because Mencius was a deviation from the orthodoxy of Confucius.

What is instructive to note here is the fact that the same classical text flexes to a considerable extent to yield different interpretations according to different, even mutually opposed, hermeneutical perspectives.

All in all, the above pages historically bear forth three hermeneutical truths in our Chinese understanding of the classical text, as to how full of political-pragmatic implications Chinese hermeneutics is, how much Chinese interpretive controversies require a common humanistic frame of reference, and how amenable the Chinese classical text is, to a considerable extent, to radically different interpretations.

Our essay has shown that all these three points were exhibited in the solid historical factuality of the Sung Confucians' hermeneutical debates over the *Mencius*, on populism versus royalism, the ruler versus the ruled, and the meaning of the *Tao*. Such Confucian scholarly debates were themselves wranglings over legitimation of political institution, policy decision, and its implementation. Such a Chinese historical phenomenon of hermeneutics as politics is rarely seen elsewhere in the world.

Notes

- 1 Yü-hai, Chüan 40. *Yi-wen*, "Chia-yu shih-ching."
- 2 T'o-t'o et. al., *Sung shih* (Ssu-pu pei-yao edition), chüan 16, Pen-chi 16, Shen-tsung 3, p. 208a.
- 3 Ch'eng I and Ch'eng Hao, *Erh Cheng Chi* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1981), p. 221; Sung Lien, *Yüan Shih* (SPPY ed.), chüan 81, p. 3a.
- 4 For a preliminary discussion of scholar-officials debates over Mencius during Wang An-shih's reform era, see: James T.C. Liu, *Reform in Sung China: Wang An-shih (1021-1086) and His New Policies*

(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 34-35; Huang Chün-chieh, *Meng Tzu* (Taipei: Tung-ta t'a-shu kung-ssu, 1993), chapter 8, pp. 139-236.

- 5 See Chün-chieh Huang, *Meng-hsüeh ssu-hsiang-shih lun* (Taipei: Tung-ta t'a-shu kung-ssu, 1991), chapter 5, pp. 111-160; Chün-chieh Huang, "Rightness and 'Profit' in Ancient China: the Polemics between Mencius and Yang Chu, Mo tzu, Hsün Tzu," *Proceedings of National Science Council*, R. O. C. Part C, January, 1993, pp. 59-72.
- 6 Cf. Chiang Fu-ts'ung, "Sung-tai i-ko kuo-ts'c ti chien-tao," in *Sung-shih Yen-chiu-chi* (Taipei: Chung-hua ts'ung shu wei-yuan-huei, 1958), Vol. 1, pp. 407-449.
- 7 Cf. Ch'ien Mu, "Lun Sung tai ti hsiang-ch'üan," in *Sung-shih yenchiu-chi*, Vol. 1, pp. 445-462.
- 8 Cf. Saeki Tomi, "Sodai no kojoshi ni tsuide," *Toho Gakuho* (Kyoto), Vol.9, ed. in Saeki Tomi, *Chugokushi kenkyu* (Kyoto: Toyoshi Kenkyukai, 1969), pp. 1-42.
- 9 For a preliminary discussion on Wang An-shih's exaltation of Mencius, see: Li Ching-te ed., *Chu-tzu yü-lei* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1981), chüan 90, p. 2294; Pai T'ing (of Yuan Dynasty), *Chan-yüan ching-yü* (Chih-pu-chu-chai ts'ung-shu edition), chüan 2, pp. 14a-b; Yang Chih-chiu, "Wang An-shih yü Meng Tzu," *She-hui k'o-hsüeh chan-hsien* (History, No.3, 1979), pp. 142-145; Kindo Masasetsu, "Wang An-shih niokeru Meng Tzu soso no tokusetsu - Yüan Feng no Meng Tzu haiko to Meng Tzu seijinron o chusin toshide," *Nihon chugoku gakkukaiho*, 36 (1984), pp. 134-147.
- 10 Takeuchi Yoshio argues that the *Mencius* is embedded in the spirit of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. The Sung scholar-officials might have intended to use the *Mencius* as their Han predecessors did the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. See Takeuchi Yoshio, "*Meng Tzu do Ch'un Ch'iu*," in *Takeuchi Yoshio Zenshu* (Tokyo: Kadogawa Shoden, 1977), Vol. 8, pp. 307-375.

- 11 This serves as one of the points of debate over the meaning of the *Tao* in B.3.b. below.
- 12 Ssu-ma Kuang, "Tao t'ung," in *Wen-kuo Ssu-ma Wen-cheng-kung wen-chi* (SPTK ts'u-pien so-pen edition, hereafter cited as *WKSMMC*), chüan 75, p. 539.
- 13 Li Kou, "Ch'ang Yü," in his *Li Kou chi* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1981, hereafter cited as *LKC*), Appendix 1, pp. 512-513; Ssu-ma Kuang, *WKSMMC*, Chüan 71, p. 518.
- 14 Ssu-ma Kuang, *WKSMMC*, p. 533 and p. 539. Cf. Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, *Chung-kuo cheng-chih ssu-hsiang-shih* (Taipei: Lien-ching ch'u-pan kung-ssu, 1982), Vol. I, p. 516.
- 15 Ch'üan Tsu-wang, *Chieh-ch'i-t'ing chi* (SPTK ts'u-pien so-pen ed.), chüan 35, p. 371a.
- 16 Cf. Huang Chiün-chieh, *Ch'un-ch'iu Chan-kuo shih-tai shang-hsien cheng-chih ti li-lun yü shih-chi* (Taipei: Wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1977), pp. 79-80.
- 17 Ssu-ma Kuang, *WKSMMC*, chüan 73, p. 513a.
- 18 Li Kuo, "Ch'ang Yü," ed. in Yü Yün-wen, *Chun Meng pien* (Shanghai: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, reproduction of *Shuo-shang-k'o ts'ung-shu* ed., 1937, hereafter cited as *CMP*), chüan 2, p. 16.
- 19 Cheng Shu-yu, "Yi-p'u che-chung," ed. in Yü Yün-wen, *CMP*, chüan II, p. 30.
- 20 Cf. Monohashi Tetsuji, *Jugaku no mokuteki to Soju Keireki shi Keigen hyakurokuju nenkan no Katsudo*, in *Monohashi Tetsuji chosakushu* (Tokyo: Daishukan Shoden, 1975), Volume 1, pp. 192-361.
- 21 This serves as another of the points of debate over the meaning of the *Tao*, in B.3.b. below.
- 22 Ssu-ma Kuang, *Hsin-chao Chih-chn T'ung-chien* (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü photo-reproduction of the punctuated edition, 1970, hereafter cited as *CCTC*), chüan 1, pp. 2-3.
- 23 Ssu-ma Kuang, *CCTC*, chüan 7, p. 25; chüan 220, p. 7050, p. 7064;

- chüan 291, p. 9511.
- 24 Ssu-ma Kuang, *CCTC.*, chüan 7, p. 231; chuan 11, p. 360; chüan 18, p. 606.
- 25 Ssu-ma Kuang, *CCTC.*, chüan 1, pp. 2-3.
- 26 Cheng Huo-shu, "Yi-p'u che-chung," in *CMP.*, chüan 2, p. 27.
- 27 Li Kuo, "Ch'ang Yü," in *CMP.*, chüan 2, p. 13.
- 28 Yü Yün-wen, *CMP.*, chüan 2, p. 18.
- 29 Chu Hsi, "Tu Yü Yun-chih chun Meng pien," in *CMP.*, chüan 1, p. 2; chüan 2, p. 14; chüan 3, p. 18.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 Chang Chiu-ch'eng, *Meng tzu chüan* (Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu chen-pen 2nd Series), chüan 14, p. 6b.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Yü Yün-wen, "Yüan Meng," in *Chün Meng pien pieh-lu* in *CMP.*, p. 59; see also *CMP.*, chüan 2, p. 26.
- 34 *CMP.*, chüan 2, p. 26.
- 35 We will reflect on this important point in our conclusive section, C.2.b.
- 36 *CMP.*, chüan 2, p. 13.
- 37 *CMP.*, chüan 2, p. 13.
- 38 Cf. Huang Chün-chieh, *Meng-hsüeh ssu-hsiang-shih lun*, Vol. 1, chapter 2.
- 39 Ssu-ma Kuang, *WKSMMC*, chüan 75, p. 539.
- 40 Ssu-ma Kuang, *CCTC.*, chüan 1, pp. 14-15; *Chi-ku lu* (SPTK ts'u-pien so-pen ed.), chüan 18, pp. 113b-115b. See also: Chang Hsü, *T'ung-chien hsüeh* (Taipei: K'ai-ming shu-chü, 1958, 1979), p. 106.
- 41 See Ssu-ma Kuang, *CCTC.*, Vol. 1, pp. 27-30, esp. p. 26; *WKSMMC*, chüan 46. "chin-hsiu chih-kuo chih yao cha-chih chuang." For the most recent discussion on this point, see Peter K. Bol's "Government, Society, and State: On the Political Visions of Ssu-ma Kuang and Wang An-shih," in Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, eds., *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty*

China, (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993,)
pp. 128-192.

- 42 In fact, Socrates has already exploited this point in his debate with Thrasymachus in the *Republic* of Plato, I. 251. "Honor among thieves" is a *sine qua non* for any communal solidarity. See Francis Macdonald Cornford, tr., *The Republic of Plato* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941, 1977) , pp. 33, 35.

中國詮釋學的政治學意涵： 宋儒的孟子學爭議

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摘要

本文通過宋代儒者對孟子政治思想的爭辯這個具體個案，分析具有中國文化特色的詮釋學的一個面向：作為政治學的詮釋學。中國歷代思想家常透過重新詮釋經典之途徑，提出他們對時代政治問題的看法與政治策略。孟子之不尊周係宋儒之孟子學爭議之引爆點，尊孟與斥孟雙方爭辯之核心問題有三：(1) 王霸之辯；(2) 君臣之分；(3) 孔子之「道」之解釋，此三大問題有其連環性在焉。

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